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President Warns Against Disclosing Secrets

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 31 — President Reagan has urged Federal employees in a memorandum not to make unauthorized disclosures of classified information, and warned that criminal prosecution would follow in cases "where circumstances warrant."

Copies of the memorandum, bearing a facsimile of the President's signature, were sent to all Federal departments and agencies Tuesday, said an Administration official who asked not to be identified. He said it was possible that some agencies might not distribute it to employees who never handle

information classified as confidential, secret or top secret.

On March 11 the President issued a National Security Decision Directive, which called for greater efforts to investigate and curb such "leaks."

The official said of the President that "no particular event or leak caused him to decide to issue the Government-wide memorandum" and added, "In effect, it is a way of looking each employee in the eye and remind them of their responsibilities."

The official said the memorandum was directed only at the disclosure of

classified information. "He's not talking about a policy paper on tax rates or of discussion of a feud in his staff," the official said. "That kind of thing annoys all Presidents, but he wanted to stress his concern about secret information."

The President's two-page memorandum described unauthorized disclosures as "illegal" and said Government employee oaths to discharge public duties faithfully "is violated" when such disclosures take place.

Mr. Reagan also wrote, "As public servants we have no legitimate excuse for resorting to such unauthorized disclosures," adding that "there are other means available to express ourselves."

He asserted that his Administration had made "every effort" to keep Congress and the public informed about national security policies. He also said there were "mechanisms" for presenting alternative views and opinions within government, probably an allusion to "dissent" channels in some departments.

"Workable procedures also exist for reporting wrongdoing or illegalities," Mr. Reagan said. He added that Government employees had the right to leave their posts and to criticize policies, adding, "What we do not have is the right to damage our country by giving away its necessary secrets."